Community PARTNERS®

Comparing Governance and Management in Classic Organizational vs. Network Settings

Two Perspectives on Governing and Managing*

Governance/ Management Dimension	Classic Organizational Perspective	Network Perspective
Setting	**Single authority structure.** This is YOUR GROUP OR ORGANIZATION! A single, independent entity such as a government agency, a business, or a charity with a mission, a leader, staff, services, etc. In this chart, organizations form the basic starting unit and we contrast what happens in single organization settings with the settings where organizations chose to work in networks with other organizations.	**Divided authority structure.** Think of this as representatives from a number of independent entities like YOUR GROUP OR ORGANIZATION who share some form of pre-existing relationships. They have freely gathered knowing that their previous relationships will grow and change by working together to accomplish a larger purpose none could tackle alone. A challenge in this setting is to work alongside many different, often strong-willed players with legitimate organizational interests. Each member/stakeholder comes to the table as an *equal partner* bearing some level of authority (and it's important to be clear about what degree of authority!) conferred by their organization. Establishing a workable network means stakeholders commit to a *purpose*ful venture. Network stakeholders must seek agreement on the compelling, urgent purpose that binds them. A network's purpose is often more encompassing and longer term *("We're in this network to assure unfailing federal subsidy of essential agricultural commodities.")* than a clearly defined organizational mission *("Our organization exists to assure that children in the Watts neighborhood of South Los Angeles receive accessible, free, nutritious lunches every day.")*. Stakeholders decide on network priorities *("We'll stay in the face of our Congress people relentlessly.")* and let tasks and activities flow from those priorities. The network remains intact so long as stakeholders remain voluntarily committed to fulfilling the shared purpose as equal partners. Stakeholder more often self-govern (in contrast to legally enforce) agreements they make in network settings. Agreements might be unwritten, but it's less confusing to write up agreements in the form of a "charter" document, an MOU, or a "relational contract" developed jointly, with all stakeholder groups approving and signing it.
Goal Structure	**Activities guided by clear goals and well-defined problems.** Here, results occur as strong, directive leaders/managers centrally guide organizational action. That's important in YOUR ORGANIZATION! The leader strives to achieve results by setting goals based on a defined social or civic problem your group was set up to address. You may have a "strategic plan" your board, management and staff work from to achieve results.	**Various and changing definition of problems and goals.** Many network stakeholders equates to many different views of "the problem" in society that all these different groups want to address. Because people in organizations are often – and quite necessarily – constrained by their viewpoint, each organization will describe its "part of the elephant" somewhat differently. Therefore, in a network, it's important to tolerate differing definitions of the problem and not try to achieve exact agreement on what an elephant looks like. It will make you crazy. Organizational approaches, histories, ways of working, capacities, etc. will vary. This reality requires flexibility and toleration from everyone. The benefit is that drawing from the resource of many different groups, managed networks can provide a more flexible, responsive platform than can any single organization operating from necessarily firm goals and well-defined problems. No organization is the network and the network cannot be any one of the organizations. Still, network flexibility and member variety coupled with each component organization's depth and strength can combine well. It works best when network managers do not insist on directing member organizations and no member organization tries to be "in charge" of the network. Managers supporting networks can help network members respond quickly to shifting priorities, emerging conditions and new opportunities.

Role of Manager	**System controller.** Think of this, perhaps, as an executive director or a program manager with top-down authority over staff and workers whose task it is to perform against specific outcomes and achieve results.	**Mediator, process manager, network builder.** Think of this as a coordinator – we call it a network manager – who does not direct, but rather *facilitates* interaction, identifies or creates opportunities, keeps people communicating with one another, helps resolve conflicts, handles logistics, notices possible new members and brings them to the attention of the network stakeholders, etc. The work here resembles the relationship-building character of a community organizer much more than it does a classic "executive or program director." Just as with the work of community organizing, voluntary participation of organizations in network settings works best when network managers do not presume their role involves directing any of the member organizations toward a pre-determined set of results. Excellent work can come in pursuit of important network tasks and activities through work teams, research groups and task forces, but the real power of a network often lies in how individual stakeholders apply the products of these efforts back home in their own organizations. All stakeholder organizations will achieve results in their own ways. Every network is only as strong as the willingness of each stakeholder "link in the chain" to contribute to the joint efforts of the network while also applying new knowledge, insight, power and capability acquired in the network setting at the individual organizational level. Problems arise in network settings when the manager steps out of the "mediator, process manager, network builder" role and attempts to "direct" members. Problems also arise when member organizations throw around disproportionate weight or authority (growing out of their superior assets, their political heft, their ability to shout more loudly, an overly robust, even inflated view of their effectiveness, or the scale of their constituency) and try to take charge of the network. Such behavior risks unbalancing the equal partnership essential as an underlying principle in networks that work. Achieving equal partnership demands that members commit to norms of civil conduct; conduct social "leveling" activities like shared meals to strengthen trust, normalize relationships and get along as human beings; deliberately adopt measures to surface, address and resolve the conflicts that can arise when groups with varied interests join around an important purpose; and, resist the temptation to wield outsize authority or threaten withdrawal of participation or resources if a dispute arises.
Management Tasks	**Planning and guiding organizational processes.** Here the manager orchestrates organizational systems, structures and staff to achieve specific, pre-determined, highly focused goals, objectives, and results.	**Guiding interactions and providing opportunities.** Think of the manager's role here as knowing the interests of all stakeholders and having a clear focus on the purpose that binds them. The manager helps create interaction among stakeholders and helps stakeholders recognize opportunities that build *purpose*ful and *purpose*-driven relationships, tasks and activities. Agreed on tasks and activities advance the network purpose *("We'll all individually but in concert lobby Senator X to include Amendment Y in Farm Bill Z.")*. They strengthen common action toward achieving the shared purpose, and the results of tasks and activities – often carried out in work or task groups – likely will redound to the benefit of individual stakeholder organizational interests. Network planning cycles for achieving a broad purpose will often be longer than typical organizational planning and goal-focused time frames.
Management Activities	**Planning, design and leading.** This is what classic managers do! It's important work essential to organizational success, yet it's different from what network managers do.	**Selecting actors and resources, influencing network conditions, and handling strategic complexity.** Network managers concentrate on maximizing the conditions in the network – information, communication, relationships, conflict resolution, agreements, processes – that help network members see their shared purpose is being achieved. Consider the following examples of cooperative, coordinative and collaborative networks: ▪ In a *cooperative* national association, handling strategic complexity might mean running a well-orchestrated annual meeting and learning conference. ▪ In a *coordinative* regional group of community health clinics, influencing network conditions might mean lobbying county government for better reimbursement rates, or selecting actors might mean bringing together the right set of local clinics to respond to a county contract demand that clinics seamlessly cover patient needs across defined geographic boundaries according to agreed-upon service standards. ▪ In a *collaborative* network of stakeholders interested in assuring water delivery to residents and businesses in a region of the country, all of these activities might come to bear broadly when serving as the gathering point for potentially competing interests. All seek to achieve the best water quality and largest supply. But environmental groups protecting habitats and developers building homes for residents – while both come to the network invested as equal stakeholders – must negotiate and reach a resolution considerate of their distinct, important interests and those of the other network stakeholders.

* Chart adapted and reprinted with permission of Sage Publications from *Managing Complex Networks: Strategies for the Public Sector* (Kickert, Klijn and Koppenjan, editors, 1997)